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Items for information

Distributive trade statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session.[1] The report outlines the progress in preparation of the revised international recommendations on distributive trade statistics, including an overview of main conclusions reached during a worldwide consultation on an annotated outline of the recommendations and a summary of the Statistics Division action plan for 2007-2009 in this area of statistics. The Commission may wish to take note of the report.

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 4* (E/2006/24), chap. I, sect. B.

* E/CN.3/2007/1.

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I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-seventh session, the Statistical Commission endorsed broadly the initiative and strategy of the Statistics Division to revise the existing international recommendations on distributive trade statistics. The Commission requested the Division to submit a progress report to its thirty-eighth session for information and revised draft recommendations at its thirty-ninth session for approval.

2. The Commission advised that (a) the revision process should be carried out in close consultation with national statistical offices in order to reflect fully the specific needs and circumstances of various groups of countries in general and the needs of countries with a substantial informal sector in particular; (b) the level of detail requested for international reporting should be commensurate with country needs and capacity to compile; (c) the Division should review existing international databases in that area of statistics to avoid creating an additional reporting burden on countries and duplication of work among international organizations; (d) the Division should develop practical guidance on the compilation of distributive trade statistics, including a description of good practices; and (e) the Division should conduct technical assistance activities in that area as a matter of priority.

3. The activities of the Division during 2006 to implement the Commission's decisions are described below.

II. Follow-up to actions taken by the Commission

A. Worldwide consultation on contents of the revised international recommendations on distributive trade statistics

4. In accordance with the Commission's recommendation, in 2006 the Statistics Division conducted a worldwide consultation on modalities and contents of the revised international recommendations on distributive trade statistics. To initiate the process the Division prepared a draft annotated outline of the recommendations and sent it for a peer review to members of the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics and several countries which have significant experience in the compilation of distributive trade statistics. The amended outline was made available to all countries for comments on 11 October 2006. The responses received as at the end of November (from 40 countries and 3 international organizations) can be summarized as follows. The respondents:

(a) Gave their overwhelming support to the Division for its initiative to revise the current recommendations; welcomed the coordinated manner, transparency and involvement of all interested parties in the revision process; and highly appreciated the inclusion of all issues relevant to this key economic activity in a single document;

(b) Found the draft outline to be comprehensive in terms of structure and content, well organized and an adequate treatment of all aspects of distributive trade statistics; and expected the revised recommendations to be a valuable reference document for statistical agencies and a wide range of users;

(c) Strongly emphasized the need for consistency and harmonization between concepts and definitions of these recommendations and all relevant

international statistical standards and handbooks issued by various inter-agency task forces and by international organizations themselves (inter alia, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, the International Labour Organization and the International Monetary Fund);

(d) Expressed strong support for a close alignment between the structure and content of the two documents the Division is working on now (the guidelines and the international recommendations on industrial statistics);

(e) Welcomed the inclusion in the recommendations of a separate section providing guidance on coverage and measurement of informal sector units engaged in trade activities;

(f) Recommended inclusion of examples, either in the recommendations or in the future technical manuals, that will clarify the concepts and will make them more helpful for compilers;

(g) Unanimously supported the integrated approach to economic statistics as proposed in a chapter dealing with data sources and data collection methods and stressed that the revision of the conceptual framework and compilation methods of distributive trade statistics should be seen as part of building an integrated economic statistics programme;

(h) Made a number of more specific suggestions that will contribute to better formulations of the future recommendations. These include boundary issues, both within the sector and between distributive trade and other activities; the treatment of e-commerce and some issues specific to distributive trade entities; coverage, frequency and timelines of data items; and a list of performance indicators;

(i) Emphasized the need for continuous information about developments in the drafting of the recommendations and the follow-up manuals to assist compilers.

5. The full text of the countries' comments is available on the website of the Division at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Distributive_trade/distributive_trade_draft_documents.htm.

B. Preparation of the revised recommendations for submission to the Commission

6. The Division is working on the consolidation of country comments and their incorporation into the provisional draft of the guidelines. An outline of the provisional draft is available as a conference room paper. The guidelines will contain nine chapters and an annex, as follows:

I. Scope of distributive trade

II. Statistical and reporting units

III. Data items and their definitions

IV. Performance indicators

V. Data sources and data compilation methods

VI. Seasonal adjustments

VII. Indices of distributive trade

VIII. Data quality and metadata on distributive trade statistics

IX. Dissemination

Annex (containing the data items for international reporting with an indication of the recommended periodicity of compilation and reporting)

7. The Division is drafting the recommendations in close cooperation with members of the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics who provide concrete inputs on various topics. The Division plans to prepare the provisional draft of the recommendations by the end of March 2007 and make it available for a country review. The amended provisional draft will be discussed at the second meeting of the Expert Group planned for 16 to 19 July 2007. The Division will invite experts from about 30 countries and interested international organizations to ensure a global representation and in-depth discussion of the provisional draft and other related matters. The main objective of the meeting is to review and endorse the provisional draft of the recommendations. The provisional draft will be amended in accordance with the conclusions of the Expert Group and submitted to the thirty-ninth session of the Commission in March 2008.

C. Actions by the Division to implement other decisions of the Commission

8. The current activities of the Division, and activities planned for 2007-2009, to implement other decisions of the Commission, include:

(a) The publication and promotion of the international recommendations on distributive trade statistics upon adoption by the Commission (2008);

(b) The collection of information in preparation for and publication on the Internet of national practices in the compilation and dissemination of distributive trade statistics (2008);

(c) The preparation of a manual and a handbook of good practices to assist compilers (2009);

(d) The development of training materials for use in technical assistance activities to help build the capabilities of countries to compile and disseminate distributive trade statistics (the first workshop is planned for 2008);

(e) The design and creation of the United Nations database on distributive trade statistics to ensure easy user access to internationally comparable data on wholesale and retail trade activities worldwide (the pilot version of the database is expected to be completed in 2009);

(f) The publication of distributive trade statistics in the United Nations Statistical Yearbook (2009).